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ABSTRACT

In an examination of the relationship between academic giftedness and the development of moral reasoning, six story pairs varying intentionality with either personal injury or property damage were group administered to 104 third and fourth graders, 52 of whom had been previously identified as gifted. Results failed to demonstrate any significant overall effect on moral reasoning for identification of giftedness although two story pairs did indicate some significant differences. A significant developmental difference was demonstrated only in the moral judgments of fourth graders in the story pair where accidental personal injury is compared to disobedient property damage. (More gifted fourth graders made judgments based on intentionality than did average IQ fourth graders.) Advanced moral reasoning by gifted students was not evidenced in the findings. (Author/CL)

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MORAL REASONING IN GIFTED AND AVERAGE I.Q. THIRD AND FOURTH GRADERS

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to examine the relationship between academic giftedness and the development of moral reasoning. Gifted students are perceived by many to be superior in all aspects of their development including the development of moral reasoning, although empirical data to support such a belief has not been conclusively demonstrated.

Six story pairs developed by Elkind and Dabek to vary intentionality with either personsal injury or property damage were group administered to 104 third and fourth graders. Fifty-two of these students had been previously identified as gifted.

Results failed to demonstrate any significant over-all effects on moral reasoning for identification of giftedness although two story pairs did indicate some significant differences. In the story pair where disobedience remained constant, gifted boys judged personal injury to be more serious than property damage significantly more often than did average I.Q. boys. While this does reflect a variation in judgment it is not viewed as a developmental difference since the personal injury/property damage variable does not measure a developmental trend. A significant developmental difference was demonstrated only in the moral judgments of fourth graders in the story pair where accidental personal injury is compared to disobedient property damage. Significantly more gifted fourth graders made judgments based on intentionality than did average I.Q. fourth graders in this instance.

A significant sex difference was found to exist in the judgment of guilt when personal injury or property damage resulted from accidental behavior. Significantly more girls judged on the basis of intentionality in this instance than did boys. This different ws found by comparing gifted boys to gifted girls and by comparing fourth grade boys to fourth grade girls.

Advanced moral reasoning by gifted students was not evidenced in the current study. Further research is necessary to determine the exact nature of the cognitive-moral development relationship. Such research should include a wider span of ages and more specific criteria for identification of individual cognitive levels than the current study. An instrument such as the new simplified, group-administrable equivalent to the Moral Judgment Interview developed by Gibbs and colleagues is recommended.

Purpose: Within the past decade there has simultaneously arisen increased interest in implementing programs of education for moral reasoning within the schools and in supporting the unique talents and potential of gifted students. Educators of the gifted are confronting the issue of meeting the specific needs of the gifted in the development of programs which foster reasoning. However, little has been done to substantiate the special abilities and needs gifted

students possess in the realm of moral reasoning. This study was designed to examine relationship between academic giftedness and the development of moral reasoning.

In an effort to determine 1) whether identified gifted third and fourth graders differ from their average peers in development of moral reasoning and 2) whether children generally regard personal injury as more serious than property damage, the following predictions were made:

1. When intentionality is held constant, both gifted and average I.Q. children will judge personal injury to be more serious than property damage.

2. With type of damage (personal or property) held constant intentional damage will be judged to be more serious by both gifted and average I.Q. children.

3. With type of damage and intentionality co-varying, younger children will tend to judge on the basis of damage incurred and older children on the basis of intentionality.

4. The shift in judgment (from basis of damage to basis of intentionality) will occur at the same age in average and gifted children.

Method

Subjects: One hundred and four third and fourth grade children attending Bozeman, Montana Public Schools were the subjects of this study. All subjects attended regular third or fourth grade classrooms. Half of the subjects also participated in the school's enrichment program for gifted students for one and one half hours each week. Average age for third grade was 8 years 7 months and for fourth grade was 9 years 7 months.

Twenty-two third graders and thirty-five fourth graders were identified as being gifted. The term "gifted" as used in this study referred to only those students identified as gifted according to the district's criteria. The criteria for inclusion in the enrichment program for gifted learners was based on a matrix of three factors as shown in Table 1. The category of average I.Q. students in this study included all regular classroom students except those identified as gifted.

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Table 1. Criteria for Inclusion in the Enrichment Program for Gifted Learners

Possible Points	Factor
1-5 pts.	Intelligence - 95th percentile or above on standardized group administered I.Q. test
1-5 pts.	Achievement - 95th percentile or above standardized achievement score in the area of reading, math or science
1-5 pts.	Teacher recommendation - of motivational factors
13-15 pts.	Required for inclusion in the enrichment program for gifted learners.

All identified gifted third graders (N=22) and thirty randomly selected gifted fourth graders were included in the study. Gifted students were matched according to age and sex with average I.Q. peers. The average I.Q. students included as subjects were from two third grade and two fourth grade randomly selected classrooms from throughout the district. The subjects were white, middle-class children.

Stimulus Material: Six story pairs developed by Elkind and Dabek (1977) and designed to measure the development of moral reasoning in kindergarten, second, and fourth grade children were used in the current study. These story pairs were selected because they present two kinds of motivation (intentional and unintentional) and two types of damage (personal injury and property damage) in all possible combinations. In this study the following operational definitions were used: "intentional damage" or "negative intentions" were terms used when a story character involved in some disobedient behavior caused damage to occur, and "unintentional damage" or "positive intentions" were terms used to identify situations in which damage occurred when the story character was obediently involved in an activity that nevertheless results in some negative consequence. All stories were approximately 35 words in length and were pilot tested by Elkind and Dabek (1977) for comparability.

Procedure: The story pairs were group administered by the enrichment program teacher to the gifted students and by the classroom teachers of the randomly selected classes of average I.Q. students. Specific instructions were provided to all instrument administrators to provide consistency in the reading of the story pairs. Teachers read each set of story pairs and then asked the subjects to circle the name of the child who was more to blame and should have been punished more and ask them to write why that child was more to blame. Teachers instructed children to record SAME on their answer sheet only if they felt both children were exactly equally guilty. After each story pair was read, teachers asked if students had any questions, answered questions of informational recall, and reread story pairs when requested.

Scoring: Coding of responses was accomplishesd in the following manner. In Story Pairs 1 and 2 where intentionality is held constant, responses were coded into three categories: property damage is more serious, personal injury is

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more serious, or both are equally serious. In Story Pairs 3 and 4 where damage is held constant, responses were coded into three categories: intentional damage is more blameful, unintentional damage is more blameful or both are equally blameful. In Story Pairs 5 and 6, where intentions and damage co-vary, responses were coded into three categories: intention is more salient than type of damage, type of damage is more salient than intention, or both are equally important. Responses to the question "Why?" were recorded for narrative purposes and were not included in the statistical analysis of data. Two independent raters established an interrater reliability of .96 based on the above procedure for coding the data.

Analysis: Data were analyzed to determine the possible effects of grade level (third or fourth), sex of child, identification of giftedness (gifted or average I.Q.), intention (intentional or unintentional), basis of judgment (intention or consequence or no difference), and damage caused (personal injury, property damage or no difference). Chi square was used to test the differences between groups. Significance level was set at the .05 level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In analyzing the data, it was found that when intentions were constant, personal injury was deemed by all groups of children to be more serious than property damage. When damage or injury was held constant, intentional damage was deemed more serious than unintentional damage by all groups of children. These findings support Hypotheses 1 and 2. In the present study, no systematic method of analysis was developed to determine the extent to which individual children integrated both intention and consequence in reaching their decisions. However, a significant difference was found to exist between Story Pairs 5 and 6.

Story Pairs 5 and 6 were designed to test the hypothesis that younger children will tend to judge on the basis of injury or damage caused while older children will judge on basis of intentionality when positive and negative intentions are combined with personal injury and property damage. In Story Pair 5, negative intentions or disobedience resulted in personal injury and positive intentions resulted in property damage. Ninety-two percent of all children deemed intentional personal injury to be more blameful.

In Story Pair 6, where unintentional personal injury was compared to intentional property damage, results were less clearly based on intentionality. Only 78% of the children judged solely on the basis of intentionality when positive intentions resulted in personal injury. When data were analyzed according to main effects for grade, sex and identification of giftedness, no significant differences were found. However, when comparing Story Pair 5 to Story Pair 6, a significant difference exists indicating that children in the current study were able to consider both intentionality and damage caused when reaching moral decisions (Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of Story Pairs 5 and 6 by total N.

	Story Pair 5 Disobedient Personal Injury vs. Obedient Property Damage	Story Pair 6 Disobedient Property Damage vs. Obedient Personal Injury
Intention	94	80
Damage	3	20
Same	5	2

$X^2 = 10.92$**

**Significant at .05 level.

Hypothesis 3 stated that when injury or damage caused both vary with intentionality, younger children will judge according to damage caused and older children according to intentionality. In Story Pair 5, 92% of the children including both third and fourth graders based their decision on intentionality. Due to this ceiling effect, this story pair cannot be legitimately used to test the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 4 stated that a shift in judgment (from damage-based to intention-based judgments) according to grade level would occur at the same age in gifted and average I.Q. students. Since Story Pairs 5 and 6 failed to confirm a significant shift from damage-based judgments to intentionality-based judgments, an evaluation of Hypothesis 4 on that basis could not be conducted. In reviewing all story pairs presented for main order effects of grade, sex and identification of giftedness, only one story pair presented an significant difference. That difference was in Story Pair 2 and involved a difference between boys and girls. There was no significant main effect difference found according to level of giftedness in any of the six story pairs.

Sex: Unanticipated sex differences were found to occur in Story Pair 2 where boys judged personal injury to be more serious than property damage (Table 3). Significantly more girls found both characters to be equally blameful because they both caused accidents or had not been careful. An inspesction of the reasoning employed reveals that these girls were making intention-based rather than damage-based decisions. It is interesting to note that a similar sex difference was not evidenced in Story Pair 1 where one character disobediently caused personal injury and the other property damage.

Krebs and Gillmore (1982, pg. 880) assessed stages of cognitive development, role-taking ability and moral development in children aged 5 to 14. In their investigation, females scored higher than males on moral development. The relationship between sex and moral developmentv was "weak but statistically significant" with the strongest sex difference at age 10. They reported "these findings are consistent with past findings that suggest females tend to pass through the first stages of moral development earlier than males."

Table 3. Main order effects by N for Story Pairs 1 and 2.

	3rd Grade	4th Grade	Gifted	Average	Boys	Girls
N=	44	60	52	52	54	50
Story Pair 1 (Disobedience)						
Personal Injury	30	36	37	29	35	31
Property Damage	8	13	8	13	13	8
Same	6	10	6	10	6	10
X^2=	$X^2 = .51$		$X^2 = 3.18$		$X^2 = 1.84$	
Story Pair 2 (Obedience)						
Personal Injury	34	38	38	34	45	27
Property Damage	2	7	6	3	3	6
Same	7	14	6	15	5	16
X^2=	$X^2 = 4.61$		$X^2 = 5.03$		$X^2 = 11.12$**	

**Note for all tables:
X^2 values > 5.99 reflect significance at .05 level for 2 df
X^2 values are not computed where any observed cell values are 0
**Significant at .05 level.

I.Q.: No overall significant differences were found in moral reasoning relative to I.Q. However, in Story Pair 1, gifted boys deemed the disobedient character causing personal injury to be more to blame than did average I.Q. boys. Both groups of boys found personal injury to be more culpable than property damage although the margin of difference was very narrow for average I.Q. boys. Only 48% of the average I.Q. boys found the child causing injury to be more to blame.

Table 4. Significant interaction for age, sex, or giftedness by N in story Pairs 1 and 2.

	Boys		4th Grade		Gifted	
	Gifted	Average	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
	27	27	30	30	27	25
Story Pair 1 (Disobedience)						
Personal Injury	22	13				
Property Damage	3	10				
Same	2	4				
X^2 =	$X^2 = 6.04^{**}$					
Story Pair 2 (Obedience)						
Personal Injury			24	14	24	14
Property Damage			3	4	1	5
Same			3	11	1	5
X^2 =			$X = 7.33_{**} X_2 = 7.89_{**}$			

**Significant at .05 level.

Significant differences were also found in comparing the effect of sex and grade and of sex and giftedness when using Story Pair 2 where injury or damage was accidentally caused by an obedient child (Table 4). When comparing fourth grade boys to fourth grade girls, 80% to 48% respectively found the child causing injury to be more to blame. When comparing gifted boys and gifted girls, 92% and 58%, respectively, deemed personal injury to be more serious. The gifted girls chose 'Same' 38% of the time.

When story pair 6 was examined for cross comparisons of grade, sex, and giftedness, a significant difference was observed for level of giftedness in fourth graders (Table 5). Since neither fourth grade gifted nor average I.Q. students recorded 'Same' responses, a 2x2 chi square rather than a 3x2 chi square was utilized to analyze data.

Table 5. Significant grade by giftedness interaction by N in Story Pair 6.

	4th Grade	
	Gifted	Average
N=	30	30
Story Pair 6		
Disobedient Property Damage	27	21
Obedient Personal Injury	2	8
Same	=	=
X_{2*} =	$X_2 = 4.36_{**}$	

* Note: Since both 'Same' cells were empty, a 2 x 2 chi square was used. Values > 3.84 are significant at .05 level for 1 df.
**Significant at .05 level.

The lack of more significant differences in moral reasoning on the basis of giftedness may be related to several factors. Kohlberg (1969, pg. 1071) made the distinction that cognitive development is necessary but not sufficient for moral development. His premise is not that moral judgment stages are cognitive per se but that the "existence of moral stages implies that moral development has a basic cognitive structural component."

It has also been found (DeVries and Kohlberg 1977) that Piagetian tasks measure significantly different tasks than general intelligence. They cite research which indicates that only about 60% of adults are able to consistently use formal operational reasoning, and that many adults with high I.Q. are in this group.

Age: More fourth graders than third graders used intentionality as the basis for judgment when intention and damage both varied. However, this difference in judgment was not significant at the .05 level. Hence Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

While other moral reasoning studies have shown significant differences in moral reasoning using age as a variable, most have encompassed a wider age-span than the current study. According to Piaget (1965), the stage of incipient cooperation spans the ages of approximately 7-11. The subjects of this study (average ages 8 years, 7 months and 9 years, 7 months) fall near the midpoing of this stage. This may explain the lack of variance for age.

CONCLUSIONS

This investigation suggests that when other factors are held constant children rate 1) personal injury to be more culpable than property damage and 2) damage caused in the course of disobedient behavior to be more blameful than accidental damage. There was no significant main effect difference found according to level of giftedness in any of the six story pairs.

When considering the interaction of grade, sex and I.Q. effects for all six story pairs, only four instances of significance were observed. Only two of those reflected differences according to level of giftedness. Gifted boys deemed personal injury as more culpable than did average boys in Story Pair 1 where negative intentions were constant. Since injury versus damage does not reflect a developmental phenomenon, this reflects merely a difference in reasoning rather than a developmental difference in moral reasoning. The only developmental difference noted was in Story Pair 6 where damage and intentionality both varied and gifted fourth grade students relied more heavily on intentionality than did fourth grade average I.Q. students.

The development of moral reasoning appears to be related to a variety of factors. The relative importance of those factors is yet to be conclusively determined. Of importance to parents and educators of academically gifted students is whether those students surpass their peers in their development of moral reasoning as has been often believed. The failure of the current study to confirm this notion of advanced moral development raises practical as well as theoretical implications. If we are to tap the potential of our most able students, we must first understand what processes are relevant to the development of their moral reasoning abilities.

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Story Pair 1:

Personal injury (intentional): Steven's mother has told him that he is not allowed to py ball in thef house. Steven is playing with the ball in the house, he throws the ball in the air, and it hits his brother in the face and gives him a bloody nose.

Property damage (intentional): Jimmy's mother has told him that he is not allowed to play ball in the house. Jimmy throws the ball in the living room and it breaks his brother's favorite record.

Story Pair 2:

Personal injury (unintentional): Jane is playing with a ball in the park. She throws the ball in the air and while running to catch it, she bumps into a friend and breaks her friend s arm.

Property damage (unintentional): Paula is playing with a ball in the park. She throws the ball and when it comes down it hits and breaks her friends glasses that are on the bench.

Story Pair 3:

Personal injury (unintentional): Chuck and his brother are helping their mother bake cookies. Chuck opens the oven door for his mother and his brother, who is standing too close to him, burns his hand on the oven door.

Personal injury (intentional): Michael's mother told him that he is not allowed to use the oven when she is not there. Michael decides to bake some cookies while his mother is out shopping. Michael lights a match, and his brother, who is standing too close burns his hand.

Story Pair 4:

Property damage (unintentional): Carol is helping to clean her sister's room. She is carrying her sister's favorite mirror and she trips and the mirror falls to the ground and breaks.

Property damage (intentional): Lynne is trying to reach for some records that her sister has asked her not to use. As she leans over to get them, she knocks down a mirror that is her sister's favorite and it falls to the ground and breaks.

Story Pair 5:

Personal injury (intentional): Jim's father told him not to ride his brother's new bicycle that day. He and his friend, Sam, rode to the candy store and on the way back, Jim bumped into Sam and Sam fell off his bike and hurt his head.

Property damage (unintentional): Larry's brother said Larry could play with his new football that day. Larry threw the ball up in the air and it landed on a nail and made a big hole in it.

Story Pair 6:

Property damage (intentional): Mary's mother does not allow her to use her sharp scissors when she is not there to help. Mary takes the scissors when her mother is out shopping, starts to cut a piece of old cloth for an art project, but later finds out it is her sister's shirt.

Personal injury (unintentional): Sarah is helping her mother sew some Halloween costumes. She asks her sister to hold the material in place while she cuts her sister's finger.

*Story Pairs were developed by Elkind and Dabek (1977) and were used with permission. Story Pair 4 has been revised.